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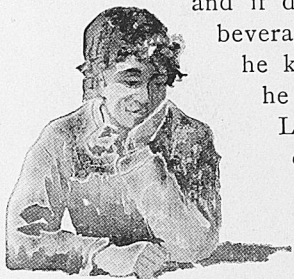
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## A RAMBLE IN OLD VENICE

BY BARNET PHILLIPS

*With original illustrations by J. Charles Arter.*

THE vender of lemonade was doing a fair business, that is for Venice. He deserved a larger custom, for he was courteous in words, elegant in pose. If his lemonade was a trifle acid, lemons being cheaper in Venice than is sugar, and if dilute, water being plentiful, he talked so sweetly that his beverage might have become saccharine by sheer absorption; and he kept on talking, and when no one was near his little stand, he apostrophized the pigeons. The pigeons knew him well. Like every Venetian, high or low, he respected the pigeons of St. Mark's, and sometimes when his business was concluded, as the pigeons remembered, it was his habit to shake out the boxes of his table on the stone pavement, and then there were fragments of that peculiarly dry, chippy cake which the Venetians eat,



and that pigeons delight in.

No wonder Mr. Arter was attracted; and one may suppose that just as the lemonade-man stood the artist sketched him, taking position on one side of a column, and the lemonade-vender caught the painter in the act, and so he struck an attitude and kept to it, offering a glass to supposititious thirsty persons, and a girl on a balcony was interested in the scene, and smiled on artist and model. Then the painter boldly advanced and demanded a glass, and critically examined the pinky fluid, but did not drink it. He put down a franc on the table, and walked away, asking for no change. It was a day of marvelous profit to the dispenser of lemonade.

Then, let us surmise, the painter stowed away his sketch, and taking a gondola bade his boatman seek uttermost Venice. As the boat threaded the dark canal there was heard the vigorous rasping of a guitar, and here was another topic. Tito, the gondolier, was quick to appreciate the faintest gesture, and so in an instant the speed of the boat was checked. The artist was musical enough to understand that his new subject was an enthusiast. It was with a vigorous hand and a muscular arm that the instrument was held and the



PINK LEMONADE



THERE COME THE BOATS



TUNING UP

strings were sounded. It was not a professional musician that was handling that guitar. The painter was dilettante, and only appreciative of the intensity of the performer. If he were a blacksmith or a boiler-maker, how he would have wielded the hammer! But then the performer suddenly sang. The voice was better than the accompaniment. It was round, full, sonorous and it drowned the vibrations of the strings. Then the painter found fault with the limitations of his art, for, as he said, "St. Cecilia poses; her organ is silent, her voice is mute. She is about to play or to sing, and that is all; we depict the preparation for action, the act itself escapes us."

Now he bethought himself of his Breton sketches; of the three women he had drawn, and how one of them, tall, imposing, held herself somewhat



BRETON FISH-WIVES





IN CHIOGGIA, VENICE

aloof. After a while he had asked about her, "What had happened to that woman?"

"The saddest thing in a woman's life," was the answer. "She was a brave child, and five years ago her betrothed left her. An excellent lad, and it was his last voyage to Newfoundland and—"

"And he never came back?" asked the artist.

"Never. There were no tidings of the fishing-smack, nor will there be. Resignation comes in time. *Le Bon Dieu* wills it so. So says the good curé."

This artist had lived for a while in a Breton auberge, among the fisher-folk and had enjoyed all their privileges. He would have deemed the people dull, never



NEWS IN THE KITCHEN

giving away to their emotions, rather a race apart from the French. They were ignorant, stolid, bigoted may be, but then so honest and industrious! He recalled a scene he once saw in a smoky kitchen of the auberge.

It was always of the sea these folks were talking. There was the maid-of-all-work, who toiled from morning to night, so that she might scrape together a few francs for her wedding-dress. She, too, had a lad on the seas. Months had passed and she had never heard from him. Then there came a letter, and she could not read it. The stable-boy was a scholar, and so he spelt out the letter aloud, and it told how Pierre was all right, and sailing homewards and had saved money and might be in the village within the week. And Clare stood stock still,



A VENETIAN BOAT-LANDING

never moved nor showed a sign, but a copper pot fell on the tiled floor with a crash.

Away past Venice sped the gondola towards Chioggia. Chioggia maybe was the birthplace of Venice in the remote past. It is nothing but a fishing-town now, with more women than men, for the husbands and sons are away following the sea. They have some curious old ways there. When a young man tells a girl that she is to be his wife, she puts aside all the ornaments she has ever worn, and accepts from the man two rings. These he puts on her first finger. She never may take them off. He may go to sea, never return, be dead, or false to her, but she must always keep her rings. If he weds her, there is a third ring to be given her. Should the girl die before her marriage, the worst of sacrileges would be to strip her of her betrothal rings. They are buried with her.

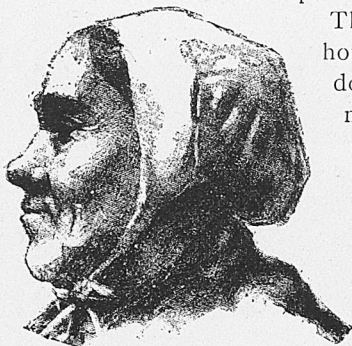
These Chioggia women are of a singular race. They are a trifle taller than ordinary Italian womanhood, and though so near to Venice affect a different dress. They are very pious, and the water-side is dotted with shrines. At Chioggia there was material not for one sketch, but for a dozen. That girl with a bunch of greenery was of exquisite gracefulness, as she walked down the rickety steps of her house. Her eyes were intent on a shrine built beyond the water's edge. Evidently she was waiting for some one to take her to that shrine. "Now dare I, Tito, offer her a passage?" asks the artist, as he quickly sketched her.

"I might do it, your honor, if I were alone, but your presence forbids it. These Chiosottes are queer, vindictive to a degree, not civilized, not people of the world, as we are in Venice. Even if your honor is not exactly a Christian, as we understand





it, the carrying of that tribute to a shrine might be excused, but we may not give room in our craft to that girl. That might lead your honor to—" Tito ended his speech with a Venetian pantomime, drawing his forefinger rapidly across his brown throat, and rolling up the whites of his eyes.



The day passed rapidly, and homewards went the gondola, past Murazzi, Malomocco, Pelestrina. Then

as evening closed, and Venice swam in the golden sea, there were many new and beautiful things to note.

The voyagers were now no longer in a lordly quarter, where loomed up the old palaces, but in the poor portions, the narrower, less frequented canals, of the wonderful city, where little domestic scenes were to be found. One was of a detached kitchen on the water-side, with the nattiest of cooks. She

had left her pots bubbling on the furnace, and stood on the water's edge as if impatiently waiting. Was it Parmesan cheese which was not at hand for her macaroni? Had the grocer's lad failed her? Was it the fish that had not been forthcoming; or was it the husband or lover who was not punctual? Every now and then she would return to her stewpans, give them a shake, and then hurry back to the canal.

"What is it, Tito?" the artist asked, "what can that pretty woman be waiting for?"

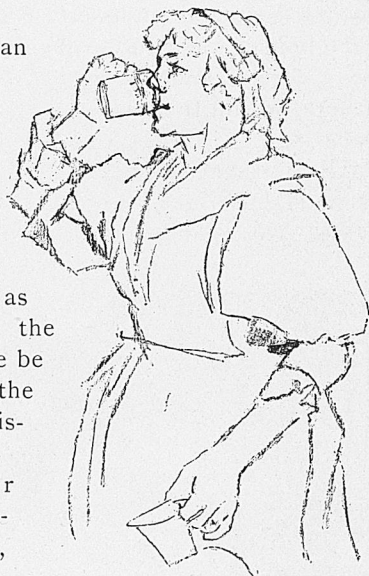
Tito replied, with an old Venetian maxim,

something like one of the sayings of the infidel Turk: "A jockey is the last person to ask about the defects of a horse, and as to a woman, neither the Prophet, may his name be blessed, nor all the Imaums pretend to discern her ways!"

There were other studies to be made, isolated figures, and heads, covered with handker-

chiefs and shawls, and finally there were two real gems.

With her face directly to the sun, and a shrine behind her, stood the perfect modern Venetian woman, shading her face with her fan; and there, close to the great church, was a graceful figure holding a pliant stick across its shoulders. The hands had imparted a curve to the supple wand, and on that, half perching, half fluttering, was one of the pigeons of St. Mark's.



That inspiration, the most supreme man ever can conceive, comes when he lands late of a moonlight night, at the foot of the place of St. Mark's. There never was conceived such a combination of nature and art. The broad expanse of water rolls beyond, with just now and then a phosphorescent gleam; before, stretches out the grand square, with the church in the background, and on both sides are the solemn buildings. There never was such a frame or such a setting. It is all the better if it be seen during the small hours of the night, for then, save a few belated ones, there are no passers-by,—even the pigeons have gone to roost.

Venice, though there is no rattle of wheels, is far from being a noiseless city. Somehow Venice is an assertive place. Even if a Venetian is apparently dumb, for the nonce, when he breaks forth into pantomime, he seems to be aggressively noisy. Street-venders howl and the tendency to chatter and bawl seems universal. But here, within this place of St. Mark's, there is almost, but not quite, a sacred silence.

"It is so trite," said the artist, "to call architecture frozen music, but here you needs must listen, for dulcet-like there is a symphony in an undertone—and may not the eye and ear be in closest sympathy?"



A SHRINE IN VENICE



A DOVE OF ST. MARK'S